

The Comparative Study of Cultural Differences of Slovak Inbound Tourists: A Need of Innovations¹

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Abstract

The aim of this article was to identify the cause of the negative attitude of Slovak population towards visitors by comparing the differences in national cultures on six primary Hofstede's dimensions: power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation and indulgence and provide comparison with Slovakia. The results revealed high score on power distance and masculinity. The high score of this two dimensions' correlates with elements of expressions of superiority and negatively affects not only the way of communication between people from the same cultural and linguistic group, but also with individuals that come from a different cultural environment. Based on these results, it is necessary to develop a smarter marketing approach – strive for innovation and unique marketing activities for a more efficient communication.

Key words

International tourists, acculturation, cultural conflicts, different cultures, Hofstede's dimensions, communication

JEL Classification: L83

Introduction

Tourism, in a statistical context, refers "to the activity of visitors taking a trip to a destination outside their usual environment, for less than a year. It can be for any purpose, including business, leisure or other personal reasons other than to be employed by a resident person, household or enterprise in the visited countries. International inbound tourism (overnights visitors) are the number of tourists who travel to a country other than that in which they have their usual residence, but outside their usual environment, for a period not exceeding 12 months and whose main purpose in visiting is other than an activity remunerated from within the country visited" (The World Bank). Thus, inbound tourism comprises the activities of a non-resident visitor within the country of reference (Eurostat). During international tourism visitor crosses national borders, what leads to the contact of two previously distinct social, cultural or civilizational culture system, resulting in changes in the original cultural patterns of ei-

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ther or both groups (Soukup, 2000). This process is commonly referred to as acculturation. Broadly, as applied to individuals, acculturation refers to changes that take place as a result of contact with culturally different people, groups, and social influences (Gibson, 2001). "At the group level, it involves changes in social structures and institutions and in cultural practices" (Berry, 2005). Acculturation as a process is of interest to many humane and social disciplines, but its application in the tourism industry predicted massive expansion of tourism in order to explain the behaviour of visitors (Ebin et al., 2001; Reisinger & Dimanche, 2010). The process itself of acculturation is not balanced process (Berry & Sam, 1997), although it has long believed that it is a one-sided process (Gordon, 1964) where the individual arriving in a new culture shares its values and standards because of his/her need to adapt to the new host culture. Scientific studies have shown that one culture may be stronger than the other (Mason, 1992), and "the weaker" culture takes the dominant elements of the stronger culture, resulting in the formation of demonstration effect which is caused by imitating behaviour patterns of visitors locals (Fisher, 2004; Monterrubio & Mendoza-Ontiveros, 2014). "Acculturation is a dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members" (Berry, 2005). The result of acculturation is creating a "demonstration effect" where host population absorbs or imitates manners, customs, clothing and culture of tourists (Rivers, 1973; Jafari, 1974). The concept of a demonstration effect has its roots in the economy, which was originally focused on describing the effect of the consumption imitation consisting in imitation of the tourist consumption by local residents. Contacting with tourists locals compared their standard of living, living conditions and consumption with consumption of visitors, which led residents to the need to imitate their behaviour of tourists. An imitation process by Fisher (2004) passes through three stages: the first stage is behaviour of tourists and residents different, in the second phase there is a transfer of behavioural patterns and in the third phase imitators demonstrate downloaded behaviour. Cultural changes are not only a result of evolutionary changes in society or lifestyles, but largely result of contacts between individuals and groups from different cultures. Culture change occurs as a result of (1) evolutionary changes occurring within a society, (2) changes in the way people live, and (3) contact between societies and groups from different cultures (e.g., hosts and visitors). All cultures are changing in response to the changes in social environment, institutions, technologies, politics, and ideologies. One of the major reasons for culture change is frequent contact between societies. Cultural elements such as values, ideas, or scientific developments are spread all over the world by travellers, immigrants, business people, guest workers, diplomats, and students (Reisinger & Dimanche, 2010, p. 70). Cultural conflicts are created by cultural contacts. Conflicts arise because those in contact (individuals or groups) are from different cultures (Reisinger & Dimanche, 2010, p. 78). According to Robinson "tourism is one globalisation influence that can initiate dramatic and irreversible changes within the cultures of host communities" (Robinson & Boniface, 1999, p. 22). Tourists are viewed as agents of cultural changes (Pearce, 1995). In analysing different national cultural concepts Hofstede (Hofstede, 1997) emphasizes that national culture is often not a question of a travel document, but its difference is the result of different ethical, regional and linguistic groups, that culture (...) is always a collective phenomenon, because this at least partly shared with people who live or lived within the same social environment (Hofstede, 2003, p. 5). Culture is learned and not innate. In other words, culture emanates from one's social environment rather than from one's genes (Hofstede, 2005). The core of culture by Hofstede's

model (1994) formed values. Values are defined by Hofstede (1980, p. 19) as "a broad tendency to prefer certain states of affairs over others". Values are the emotions having positive or negative polarity. We gain them early in life absorbing information from our surroundings. The original Hofstede's theory proposed four dimensions of national culture:

Despite enormous natural and touristic potential, tourism in Slovakia suffers. In 2014 Slovakia was visited only by 1,475,017. In year 2015 this number slightly increased to 1,721,193 tourists due the terrorist attacks carried out by terrorist groups. Nevertheless, the indicator of attitude of domestic population towards foreign visitors is no longer in ranking by the World Economic Forum, the fact remains that it cannot assume that the attitude of the Slovak population has changed within one year. The aim of this article was to identify the cause of the negative attitude towards visitors by comparing the differences in national cultures on six primary dimensions: power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation and indulgence and provide comparison with Slovakia.

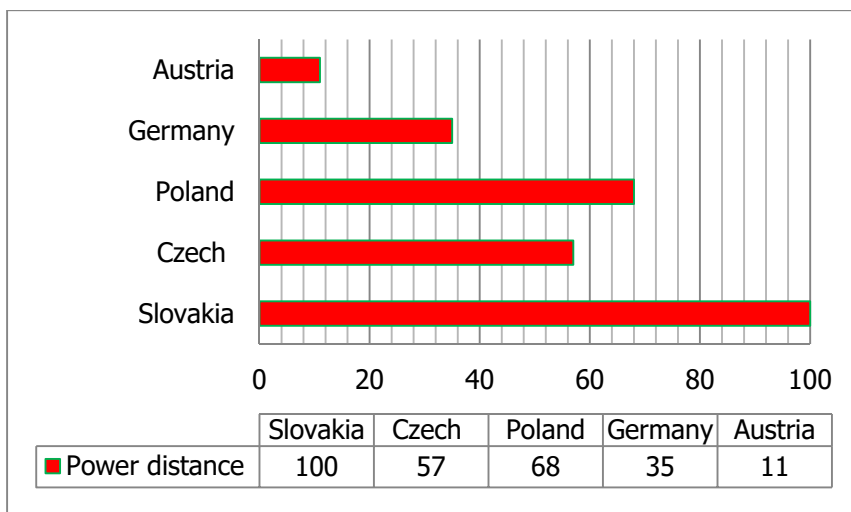
1 Methodology

Although tourism has usually a positive effect on tourists and locals, tourism can also contribute to irreversible changes in societies. When different social groups come together – especially groups with significant differences in languages, ethnicities, religions, or lifestyles – the potential exists for misunderstandings and culture clash (Nelson, 2013, p. 187). Culture has a strong influence on behaviour and so an understanding of cultural tourist backgrounds can also affect the relationship of residents to visitors. Different cultural environment affects dynamically the relationship between residents and tourists (Doxey, 1975; Butler, 1980). The focus of this article is to identify culture-specifics of the main segments of inbound tourists coming to Slovakia. The reason for this focus is better understanding of their behaviour and improvement of relations between residents and visitors. The knowledge gained from the identification of these factors might serve as a source of information for modifying relations between residents and visitors via tourist marketing programs. The main method for quantification of cultural differences of incoming tourists was the application of six Hofstede's dimensions: (1) Power Distance, (2) Individualism versus Collectivism, (3) Uncertainty-Avoidance, (4) Masculinity versus Femininity, (5) Long-term versus Short-term Orientation, (6) Indulgence versus Restraint. Source of data was official statistical data collected by Statistic Office of Slovak Republic in 2015. The object of comparison is five countries from which the most visitors come to Slovakia: Czech Republic 509,700 inbound tourists, Poland 168,358 inbound tourists, Germany 158,857 inbound tourists, Austria 81,589 inbound tourists. The studied problem can be formulated into a research question whether there are relevant differences in cultures of inbound tourists, which were highlighted by the negative attitude of the Slovak population to inbound tourists as measured by World Economic Forum in 2014 in the indicator position of the domestic population to visitors from abroad.

2 Results and Discussion

The success of any tourist destination consists in application of an appropriate strategy to evoke favorable reactions of the visitors. Visitors responses, however, depends on cultural differences. Investigation of the national cultural differences may be one of the ways how to explain and subsequently improve the relations between residents and tourists. This study is one of the few analyzing the relations inbound tourists incoming to Slovakia via Hofstede's initial data.

Graph 1 Comparison of selected countries: Hofstede´s dimension of Power distance



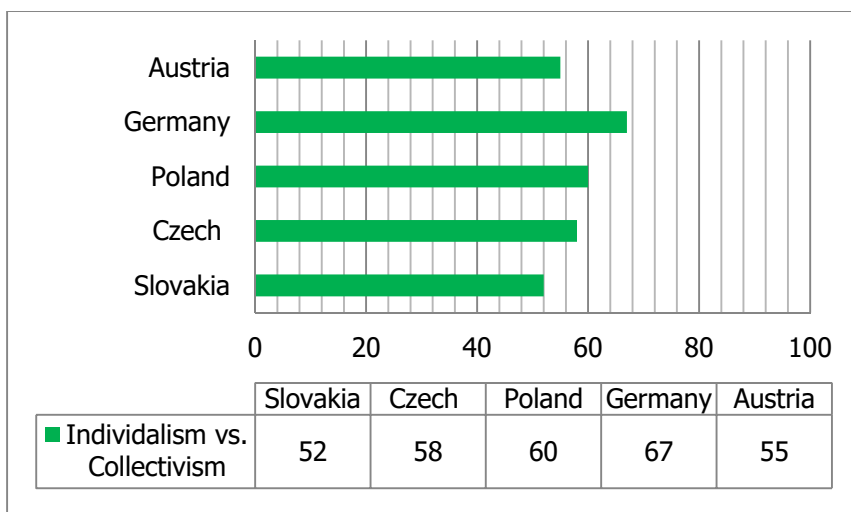
Source: own processing, 2016

Graph 1 compares, Czech Republic, Poland, Germany and Austria via Hofstede's dimensions. Dimension of power distance (DPD): According to Hofstede this dimension of national culture refers to the perception of inequalities distribution of power, reflecting the distance between people in different social positions (e.g. between leaders and subordinates).

An evaluation referred countries showed extreme values for Slovakia 100/100. Other countries have showed significantly lower values of Poland 68/100, Czech Republic 57/100, Germany 35/100 and Austria only 11/100. High score of this dimension is in general typical for totalitarian regimes, as documented by the higher value of post-totalitarian countries such as the Czech Republic and Poland. Whereas, for the high index is typical relationship of subordination and superiority, as well as the acceptance of certain the division of society into "haves" and "have-nots". The relationship of the residents and tourists will be affected by copying the behavior of senior media celebrities from the arts, economic and political scene. Index of power distance also shows the links within social structures. The high value of the index is typical for a high dependence in relation between parents and children. By comparing the achieved score we can conclude that especially younger age groups of tourists compared to the same age group of residents will exhibit more independent and open behavior that might meet a negative response by the residents. The economic effect of mentioned dimen-

sion also shows an interesting correlation between the amount of tips and origin of the tourists. According to a study by Idowu (1962) tourists coming from countries with a high value of DPD give higher tips as tourists compared to those from countries with low DPD. As the other countries show much lower DPD compared to Slovakia, the visitors of these countries may not be welcomed clientele by the residents whose tips constitutes a significant part of income.

Graph 2 Comparison of selected countries: Hofstede dimension of Individualism vs. Collectivism

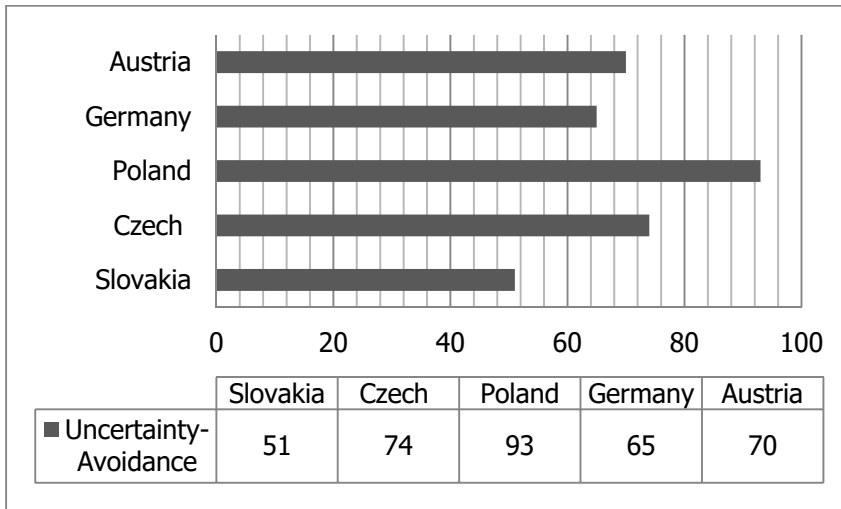


Source: own processing, 2015

Individualism versus collectivism refers to the degree of dependence of the individual on the collective (family, team etc.) and his/her freedom for personal initiative. Looking at the comparison, we can see that the highest value has been reached by Germany, what suggest that the German tourists are more dependent on tour operators and travel agencies, what requires precise logistics and impeccable services. A mismatch of standards between the Slovak service providers and the standards of services in tourist’s home country constitutes the basis for dissatisfaction of all stakeholders (Donthu & Yoo, 1998; Furrer & Sudharshan, 2000; Chen, 2000).

Avoiding uncertainty, according to Hofstede describes the extent to which members of the culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations. The point is how changes their attitude with risky and uncertain circumstances, i.e. changing jobs. From the perspective of residents, low value of uncertainty-avoidance shapes the behavior of the staff in the entire tourism infrastructure. Slovakia has the lowest levels of uncertainty avoidance (as opposed to the incoming tourists), which is reflected in the increased fluctuations directly correlating with the quality of service provision.

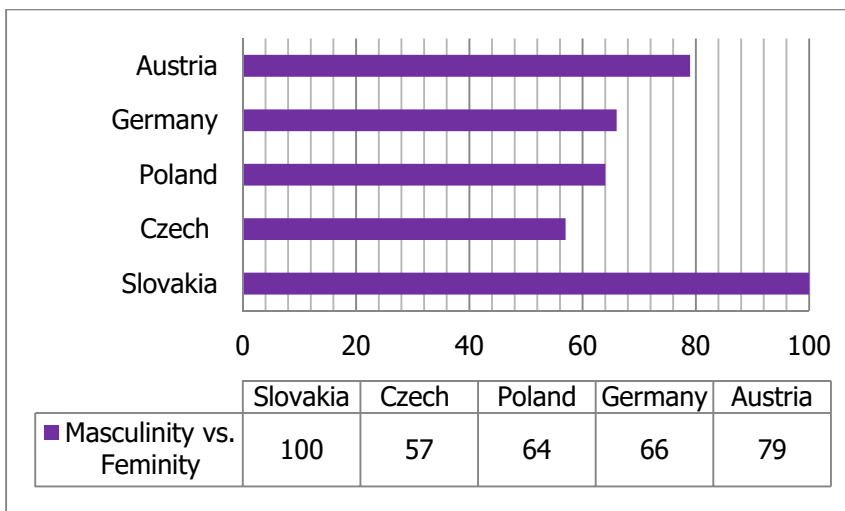
Graph 3 Comparison of selected countries: Hofstede’s dimension of Uncertainty- Avoidance



Source: own processing, 2015

On contrary, the tourists from TOP 5 countries come from countries where is a tendency to eliminate uncertainty expect accurate, reliable and efficiently operating services (Litvin, Crotts & Hefner, 2004). Pragmatic approach of Slovak people (as staff in employment and as residents in private life) again creates a contact surface for confrontation.

Graph 4 Comparison of selected countries: Hofstede’s dimension of Masculinity vs. Feminity

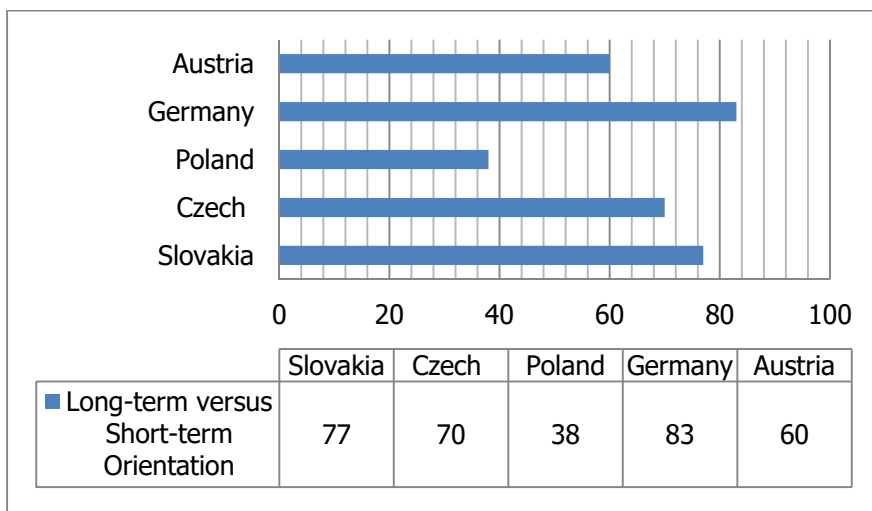


Source: own processing, 2015

This dimension of so-called male element in the value of the corresponding culture (self-assertion, competitiveness) reflects if the roles of genders are clearly differ-

entiated. The highest value of Slovakia shows that the dominant values are success, money and material security, not quality of life and care of others, which in relations to visitors appear as a serious handicap with respect to nature tourism. A high value indicates the behaviour of Slovakia's residents, where the male part is predominant manifestation of male ego. According to Hofstede (1983) members coming from countries with feminine cultures tend to be less aggressive and more modest than members of masculine societies. The comparison showed that domestic residents have a need to demonstrate their superiority.

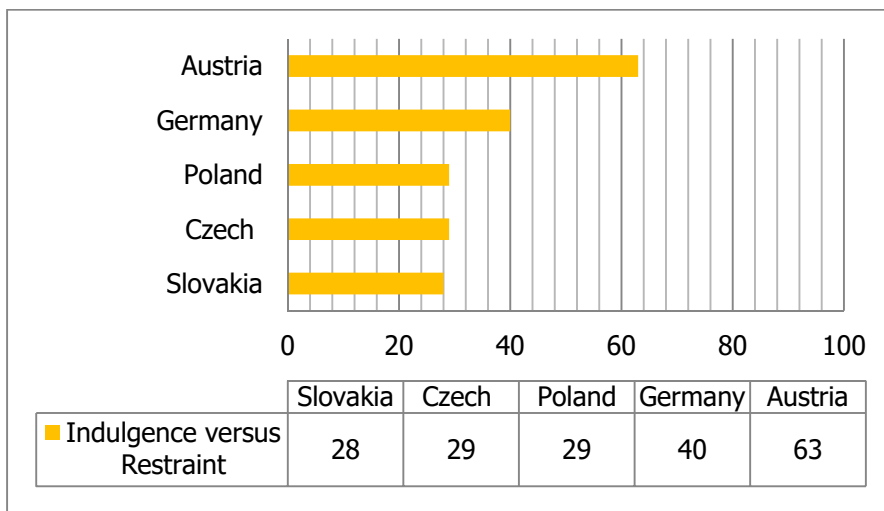
Graph 5 Comparison of selected countries: Hofstede's dimension of Long-term vs. Short-term Orientation



Source: own processing, 2015

In terms of long-term orientation of Confucian dynamism, in other words cultural aspect perception of time by Hofstede indicates significantly different values. Slovakia achieved comparable value to Czech Republic. A slightly lower value of Austria is linked to the value orientation being built in certain historical phases (Austro-Hungarian Monarchy). The value system of Poland and Germany in relation to countries which at some stage of their development lived together (Slovakia, Czech and Austria) is considerably different. The achieved value of Poland indicates that Poland belongs to cultures with the short-term orientation while Germany moves into the upper end of the long-term orientation index. With the above dimension correlates also thrift. From the viewpoint of tourists, we can assess their spending habits: while Polish tourists will spend the most German tourists are the relatively pragmatic and spend very wisely. It should be noted that thrift does not correlate with the achievement of income, because the average wage in Poland is 915.57 Eur (January 2015), while in Germany it is significantly higher 2 315.20 Eur. Different ideas about spending money can lead to creation of a certain kind of antipathy, when tourists from wealthier countries spend less and judiciously, and in combination with the results of other Hofstede's dimensions requires precise service. However, in any case, the relatively higher value indicates a certain capability of Slovakia to adapt to new conditions, in contrast to the Poland, where low value indicates clinging to the past and tradition.

Graph 6 Comparison of selected countries: Hofstede’s dimension of Indulgence vs. Restraint



Source: own processing, 2015

According to Mink, who is the author of dimension Indulgence versus Restraint, indulgence stands for a society that allows relatively free gratification of basic and natural human drives related to enjoying life and having fun. Restraint stands for a society that suppresses gratification of needs and regulates it by means of strict social norms (Hofstede et al., 2010, s. 281). The value of this dimension is comparably low for Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland, indicating a lower degree of satisfying the needs and tends to regulate their behavior through stricter social norms. The similarity in values is mainly the result of a joint communist development by establishing uniform criteria for throughout the Eastern bloc. From the perspective of tourist clients, the tourists from Austria show the highest value, what characterizes them as happy people with positive mood and a desire to actively participate in all activities that provide the destination where they come as tourists.

Conclusion

Tourism destinations increasingly use suitable strategies to evoke favourable consumer reactions. If the tourism industry wants to be successful in the future, steps need to be taken to:

- Development of appropriate professional training programs for tourism operators and staff
- Improve the efficiency of the national education system
- Creation of the policy of structural education in tourism
- Publications that promote the benefits of tourism such as those developed by State Tourism Organisations
- Promotional campaigns where local businesses highlight that "tourism is everybody's business" (Tourism Australia)

- Publications that promote the benefits of tourism such as those developed by State Tourism Organisations
- Mobilise the population which must be prompted to cultivate the fundamental values of warmth and hospitality.

Understanding and respecting the national cultures of others can prevent potential misunderstandings and conflicts in international tourism and significantly improve social contact between international tourists and local hosts, thus enhance the tourist satisfaction and generate repeat visitation (Reisinger & Dimanche, 2009). These findings indicate that cultural differences of selected countries have a big impact on consumption behaviour and they are the main determinant of relations to residents. If the tourism development should be well planned and profitable it is necessary, a permanently monitor the cultural environment of the incoming tourists. Tourism is inevitably associated with communication of members of various cultural communities, different nations and ethnic groups, racial, religious and linguistic groups. Communication between cultures enriches the cultural identity. The culture for improvement and own preservation needs continual exchange of content and forms with other cultures. This mutual exchange of new content between cultures and enriches the cultural identity (Mistrić, 1999, p. 94).

Misunderstanding of cultures leads to conflicts, but in tourism it also means significant economic losses, reducing jobs, the frustrations with own country. Low turnout of country is not a result of lacking promotions, but a result of negative attitude of residents and tourists, caused misunderstanding and disrespect to the cultural environment from which they come, inability to offer products and services which are determined by the needs of tourists. Furthermore, this confirms the words of leading Slovak psychologist Jurovský, who says that Slovakia is a "person who readily responds to everything, is active in his/her area, although his/her activity is not permanent and constantly needs new impulses. On the other hand, there is a trait of defiance and resistance to external pressure" (Gbúrová, 2002, p. 208-209).

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